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ROBIN OF SHERWOOD

AND OTHER STORIES

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Selected from ROBIN HOOD

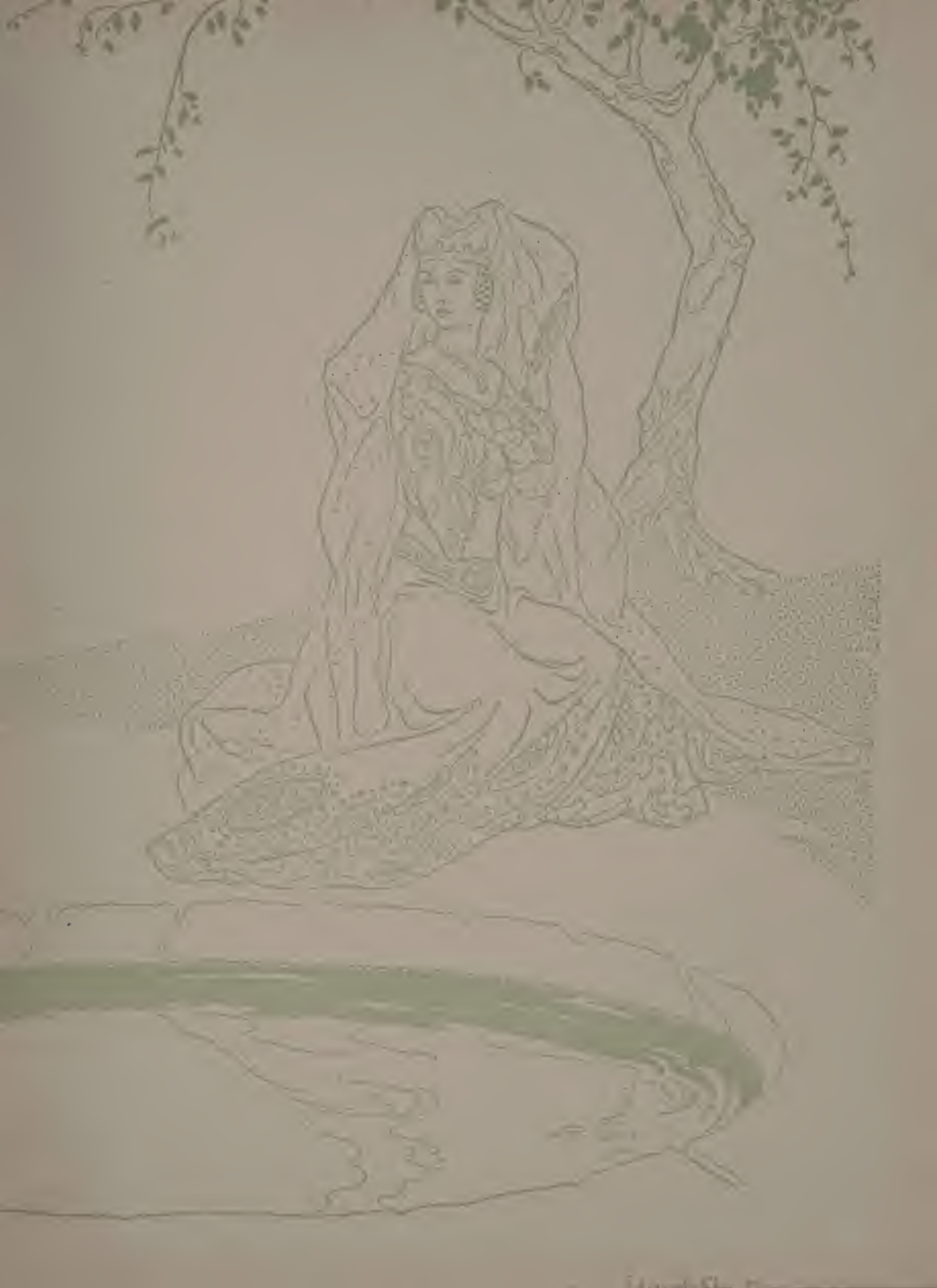


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ROBIN OF SHERWOOD AND OTHER STORIES

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The stranger fetched Robin a knock on the crown.

ROBIN OF SHERWOOD · · AND OTHER STORIES



With illustrations in color
by Rowland Wheelwright

And in black and white
by Edward Shenton

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Robin of Sherwood and Other Stories

I

HOW ROBIN FLED TO SHERWOOD

ROBERT, the grandson and heir of Richard, Earl of Huntingdon, was brought up at Earl Richard's castle, which was in the neighborhood of Sherwood Forest. Little Robert had a happy life. He was taught by good Father Francis in the duties of his religion and a little book-learning. His grandfather's squires instructed him in the use of the sword; and some of the men in handling the good old English weapons of the quarter-staff and the bow and arrows. Occasionally wandering minstrels came to the castle, and little Robert, stretched at his grandfather's feet before the great open fire, would listen eagerly to the noble tales of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. Best of all things, however, he loved to wander

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in Sherwood Forest, and to hear the whiz of the arrow as it flew through the air.

Little Robert was well beloved by the people both of the castle and of the courtyard. Not only was this because he was the grandson of the Earl, nor even because his father and mother had been general favorites. There was something about the lad himself that drew all hearts to him. He bore himself in the same fashion to high and low. He was as much interested in the poor folks of cottage and hut as in the lords and ladies who sometimes came to the castle. He had been christened Robert; but Robin was the name by which he came to be called affectionately by all. Even the Earl used it, and the real name seemed likely to be forgotten altogether.

Robin was only thirteen when the Earl died, and the child, with a guardian, succeeded to his grandfather's vast estates. He mourned the old man bitterly; for the Earl, stern to others, had been gentle to him; but when the first shock of the loss was over, the young Earl could not but find life still a happy thing, with his great castle filled with devoted servants, the joys of the hunt in Sherwood Forest, and the daily pleasures of practice with the sword and the quarter-staff.

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He was just fourteen when the Earl of Fitzwalter, who had been a close friend of Robin's grandfather, came, with his wife and daughter, to visit the young heir of his old friend. Marian Fitzwalter was about two years younger than Robin, a gallant little lass, straight and slim as a handsome boy, and almost as devoted to the hunt as the lad himself. They immediately became great friends. The two young people spent a happy fortnight wandering through Sherwood Forest together, and trying their skill with the bow and arrow. Then they parted sorrowfully, not to meet again for several years.

It was just twelve months later when Robin's whole life changed.

On his fifteenth birthday, a beautiful day in June, Robin left the castle, and went walking gayly on his way to Nottingham, the town near by. He intended to dine at the public inn at Nottingham, a thing he loved to do, for he was fond of meeting all sorts of people. As he strode briskly through the forest, singing a gay song, his bow slung across his back, his quiver of arrows by his side, he was a goodly sight to see. He was strong, and unusually tall. His eyes were frank and fearless, and his face was burnt from

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much exposure to wind and weather. Altogether he was as sturdy an English boy as might have been found throughout the land that day.

As he approached the Saracen's Head, the inn at Nottingham, he saw a little group of the King's foresters sitting around the table in the yard. They had been drinking rather heavily, judging from their appearance and from the many overturned, empty tankards near by. On the approach of the young Earl, they greeted him politely enough; but with somewhat sour expressions. It was well known even then that Robin was no friend of the King's foresters. His generous heart had often been touched by the want of the poor; and he could see no reason, with such herds of deer filling the vast forests, why one of the King's subjects should go hungry. It was the duty of the foresters to guard the royal game.

He nodded pleasantly in answer to their greeting, and seating himself at one of the tables, called for ale.

"What news, good men?" he asked.

"What news?" said one of the men, in rather a surly fashion. "Well, I will tell you. Our King is holding a shooting match."

Robin's face flushed with delight.

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“That is good news indeed!” he cried brightly. “I’m ready with my bow!” and he touched his beloved bow caressingly where it lay on the bench beside him.

The forester who had spoken of the match gave a short scornful laugh.

“You!” he said contemptuously. “A boy as young as you draw a bow before the King! You are not able to draw one string!”

This was a trying taunt to a boy of fifteen who rather prided himself, and justly so, on his skill in archery. He opened his lips to retort sharply; but his good breeding prevented angry speech. It was not for a gentleman to squabble with a servant. After an instant’s pause, he said calmly:

“I’ll wager twenty marks that, Our Lady willing, I’ll hit a mark at a hundred rods; nay, more—I’ll kill a hart as well.”

The foresters exchanged meaning glances with one another. There was a moment’s silence after Robin’s challenge. Then one of the men said with apparent coolness:

“Well, well, we shall see! Come, young sir, show us whether your actions tally with your words.”

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“That will I gladly!” said Robin.

And with that he started up eagerly and seized his bow. “Will one of you place the target, or shall I?” he asked.

“Let it be that beech tree,” said one of the foresters.

Robin laughed contemptuously.

“Too easy!” he said. “That would be mere child’s play! No, I’ll show you my mark, and if you don’t like it, you may choose another.”

He walked towards a young willow tree that stood near the doorway of the inn, broke off a branch, peeled it quickly, and stuck it into the ground. When the slender quivering target stood in its place, Robin ran gayly back and seized his bow.

“Now, as I promised, a hundred rods away!” he cried, and took his place.

“Are you all satisfied with my mark?” he asked, and even as he spoke, aimed with apparent carelessness.

Straight flew the arrow and the willow wand was cut in two.

There was a low murmur of admiration at the boy’s skill, and Robin stood smiling with pardon-

able pride. The next moment he turned and gazed in the direction of the forest.

“Now, dearest Lady and Virgin,” he prayed, “send me, I beseech you, a hart, that I may show these scoffing fellows what I can do!”

It was a very boyish prayer, and perhaps for that reason was answered. Scarcely had the murmured words left his lips than Robin gave a shout of joy. A hart came out from the forest, and began to run swiftly across the open space beyond, as if bewildered. Robin again raised his bow. The next moment, the hart gave a great leap into the air, and fell dead.

Robin turned to the foresters, smiling with boyish delight.

“Some of you go pick it up!” he said, with a lordly wave of his hand. Then he chuckled. “How say you?” he said. “Is not the wager mine — ay, even if it were for a thousand pounds?”

“No,” said one of the foresters sharply. “The wager is not yours. Don’t you know the penalty for killing one of the King’s deer? Get hence in haste, you young braggart, lest we baste your sides for you!”

Robin turned pale with dismay. The penalty

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for slaying one of the King's deer was death or branding. He knew the law well, and had shot the hart almost instinctively, never pausing to think whose it was. Moreover, he realized now that the whole thing had been a trap, and that he was in the midst of enemies. He saw not a single friendly face in the group that surrounded him.

He picked up his bow and his quiver and turning, began to walk slowly away from the inn. As he reached the gate, there was a sudden roar of scornful laughter.

"Ho! ho!" roared the forester who had caused most of the trouble, "I thought the youngster would be cowed! He's no archer, in spite of his lucky shots!"

Robin stopped short, his face flushing with rage. He wheeled towards them.

"No archer, am I?" he called out, his heart hot with anger, his clear young voice shaking with fury. "No archer, am I? Say so again!" and once more with apparent carelessness of aim, he let fly an arrow.

The next instant the boy gave a cry of horror, and turning, fled with stumbling steps towards the forest. It was an age when human life was



Robin fled towards the forest.

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held cheap; but Robin had never before killed a man. He groaned as he ran, and covered his eyes with his hands as if to shut out the sight he had seen of the forester falling with Robin's arrow in his heart.

Robin had killed one of the King's deer, and he had slain a King's forester. In spite of his noble birth and his wide lands, he was an outlaw by his own acts. He ran blindly towards the place he loved best, and reached at length the friendly shades of the forest. There finally he paused under the great oak tree where his grandfather had so often told him he had been born.

"Ah, woe worth the day!" he cried aloud, clutching his head in his hands, as he threw himself down on the soft moss. "Would now that here where I was born I might also die!"

II

HOW THE EARL OF HUNTINGDON BECAME ROBIN HOOD

ROBIN was young, but he was no coward. After his first outburst of sobs when he found himself safe in the forest, he calmed down with a mighty effort, and sat upright, his chin propped in his hands, his brow knitted with thought. His bow lay beside him on the moss, his quiver still hung by his side. He sat there for a while, wondering what was best to do. Should he go home? His men would rally to his defence, he was certain, but at the risk of their own lives and freedom. Had he the right to ask that of them? Now that he was an outlaw, should he return to the castle?

Presently a rustling sound in a clump of trees near by startled him. His hand instinctively clutched at his bow. The next instant, he sprang up, feeling for an arrow. A man's head appeared from among the bushes; and then a tall

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fellow whom he had never seen before came from the trees towards him. Seeing Robin with his bow in his hand, the stranger shook his head and smiled, stretching out his hands to show that he held no weapon. At this Robin lowered his bow, and stood waiting. The man was dressed in shabby forest green.

“Fear not, young sir!” he exclaimed in a gruff but kindly voice. “I do not seek your harm, but your good!”

Somewhat reassured, Robin looked at him questioningly.

The man came forward and sat down at Robin’s feet.

“Will you not sit here beside me, and listen to what I have to say?” he asked. “I would like to tell you what I think you would find it well to hear.”

Robin dropped down on the moss beside him.

The stranger glanced cautiously about him; then leaned forward, and spoke in a low whisper.

“News travels fast in the forest,” he said. “Fear not! I know why you are here.”

In spite of himself, tears rose to Robin’s eyes. The stranger put his huge hand on the lad’s hand with a gesture that was almost a caress.

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“It is no shame to kill what should be shared by all,” he said. “I have come to you, lad, as a messenger.”

Robin looked at him in dismay. A messenger! From whom? Was he from the King? Had he come to capture Robin?

“No, fear not!” repeated the man, perhaps reading Robin’s thoughts in his wide eyes and high color. “I am a messenger from some good friends who invite you to become one of them. They are all men who have suffered from tyranny and injustice, even as you have; men who like you may be punished if captured. We live here in the forest, and we have often seen you although you have not seen us.”

Robin looked at him wonderingly.

“Here in the forest!” he repeated. “I thought I knew all that went on in Sherwood.”

The man shook his head and laughed.

“I will show you that you are wrong,” he said. “Come with me.”

“All right, I will come,” said Robin, rising. “Will you tell me your name?”

“My name,” answered the stranger, “is Will Stutely.”

“Will Stutely,” repeated Robin. “Oh, yes, I

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have heard of you! I have heard ——” He bit his lips sharply and paused.

“If you have heard of me, you have heard a sad story,” said Will simply. “My mother was a widow, and her farm was taken by my Lord, the Bishop of Hereford, because it happened to lie on the edge of his lands where he wanted an extra bit of ground. I stood up against the Lord Bishop’s men, and I slew three of them, so was forced to flee. My mother died of fear and grief. I came here to the forest, and met those whom you shall shortly meet.”

Robin put his hand on the man’s shoulder as they walked along together.

“Yes, that is what I heard,” he said simply. “You have suffered much.”

It was nearly sunset now, and the less thickly wooded parts of the forest were filled with rosy light. Presently Will and Robin smelt the appetizing odor of broiling venison; and Robin realized that he had eaten nothing since morning and that he was very hungry. A moment more, and they came into an open glade, with a fire roaring in the midst, around which sat or stood about twenty men, dressed like Will Stutely, in shabby forest green.

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When they saw Will and Robin, they gave a shout of joy, and some ran forward to greet them.

“Welcome, young Robin,” they cried, “welcome to Sherwood!”

“One of you give him something to eat without delay,” said Will Stutely. “He must be famished. After we have dined, we can talk together.”

Obediently, they led Robin to a rudely set table on the grass, and presently the venison was served, with plenty of good bread and ale. Then the fire was allowed to die down, and the men sat or lay about on the mossy ground, and told Robin why they had brought him to this meeting. One after another told the story of why he was now an outlaw; and in no case was the reason one of real crime. Some had resisted oppression from proud Churchmen or haughty knight; some had fought injustice in law and man. Robin’s generous young heart, always kindly and quick to protect the poor and the downtrodden, burned hot within him as he listened. He determined to try to right their wrongs and those of others like them. Then his high mood sank. He remembered that he too was an outlaw now, even as they.

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After a time there was a pause, and all eyes turned to Will Stutely.

Will said quietly:

“ You see, lad, what we are; outlaws, yet not truly criminal. One brought us word of what happened to you this day, and we thought—We need a leader. Will you fill that place for us? You are the youngest here; but also you are the only one of gentle blood and breeding. Also you are like us, outlaw. Now that your castle is yours no more, will you be one of us here in the greenwood? ”

Robin looked around him at the kindly, weather-beaten faces, all turned towards him now in trust and hope. Again his heart rose in generous ardor; and this time also with joy and pride.

“ Yes,” he answered, his face flushing, “ I will be your leader, since you so wish, young as I am; but hark you, men! ” and he sprang to his feet, his face alight. “ Remember, having been oppressed ourselves, we must aid those in similar situation. No, more! You must hold all women sacred, for the sake ”—he bared his head reverently—“ for the sake of Our dear Lady, whom for my mother’s sake as well as for her own, I love. Out-

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lawed we are through misfortune, but wicked we must never be! If you consent to these conditions, I will do what you want.”

Then there arose a mighty shout which made the darkening forest ring again; and Robin's health was drunk in good English ale, and since he was beginning a new life, it was proposed that he should choose a new name. So Robin shortened his title of Huntingdon into Hood, and henceforth he said he would be Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest.

Great was the anxiety at the castle when the dearly beloved young Earl did not return in the late afternoon, at the time he was expected. Greater still was the dismay when tidings came of what had happened, and when the Sheriff of Nottingham rode up to the gates of the castle, and declared that Robert, Earl of Huntingdon, was outlaw in the King's name, and that his lands were now the property of the crown. Within a few days the castle was deserted except for a few of the Sheriff's officers, who waited to see whether by any chance the young Earl might be concealed in some secret room, or whether he might wander back from without. After a time even the

Sheriff's officers departed, and the castle was left empty until the King's pleasure should be known in regard to it.

Some of Robin's men heard where he was, and joined him in the forest. Others went to Nottingham, and yet others to London. The band in Sherwood Forest grew larger day by day.

Robin grew tall and strong in the healthful outdoor life. His skill with the bow became greater than ever; and in spite of his youth, his men rendered him both obedience and love. That inborn personal charm of his attracted to him nearly everyone with whom he came in contact. The Sheriff of Nottingham raged and stormed in vain. It was perfectly well known that Robin was in the forest, but it seemed impossible to capture him. The Sheriff's officers were afraid of Robin's archers; and the King in London seemed very far away in those days. The poor loved Robin and his men; for they kept to the agreement that Robin had proposed. Many a starving widow was provided with food, many a poor, pretty maid with a dowry taken from the wealth of some proud Bishop or overbearing Earl. Robin never did wrong to any good clergymen and they came to love him as much as

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did their people, for they realized that he meant only kindness to those who deserved it.

At last five years had passed, and Robin's twenty followers had increased to five times that number. He had a special signal by which he always summoned his men when he needed them—three blasts of his horn. They loved him well, and it was on the whole a happy life. Sometimes, however, in the forest, especially when the moonlight silvered the leaves and turned Sherwood into a magic land, Robin thought of sweet Marian, the Earl of Fitzwalter's daughter, and wondered whether she ever thought of him, and whether he would ever see her again in all her beauty. He had heard that she was now in London, and lady-in-waiting to the Queen. What right had he even to think of her—the outlaw, Robin of Sherwood?

III

HOW ROBIN HOOD MET LITTLE JOHN

ROBIN HOOD was about twenty years old when he first met his best friend, Little John.

“We have had no sport these fourteen long days,” said Robin to his men one morning. “Wait here, for I will go alone in search of adventure; but look you listen for my call, for I will blow my horn if I become hard-pressed.”

He shook hands with those nearest him as was his custom, and strode forward through the greenwood, whistling merrily, and swinging his bow as he went. On he walked, rejoicing in the beauty of the May morning, and at last on the edge of the forest, he came to a little brook, crossed by a very low and narrow bridge. As Robin neared the bridge, he saw that a stranger was crossing it towards him. An immense fellow he was. Robin was nearly six feet tall at this time; but the other man was more than a foot

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greater in height. His limbs were large and muscular, and he carried a huge staff.

Nothing daunted, however, Robin strode forward, and the two men met in the centre of the bridge. They stood a moment in silence, eyeing each other; and then Robin spoke.

“Let me pass, stranger!” he said. “If thou dost not, I’ll show thee right Nottingham play!” and he fingered his bow, and drew an arrow from his quiver, a broad one with a goose wing.

The stranger gave a roar of laughter.

“Ha, young one!” he said. “I’ll beat thy hide if thou but touch the string!”

Robin was accustomed to much deference, and he was conscious of his own skill. He grew crimson with rage.

“Thou dost talk like an ass!” he said calmly. “If I were but to bend my bow, I could send an arrow through thy proud heart before thou couldst strike one blow!”

“Coward!” the stranger cried contemptuously. “There thou standest, well armed with a long bow, to shoot at my heart, while I have only this staff in my hand.”

Robin looked at him thoughtfully.

“I scorn the name of coward,” he answered



Edward Sheulton

So they fell to without more words, and began to flourish their staves.

presently. "Perhaps thou art right. Wherefore I will e'en lay by my long bow, and take a staff to try the truth of thy manhood."

So saying, he stepped to a thicket near by, and chose a ground-oak staff. Then he came back upon the bridge, and again faced the stranger.

"See my staff!" he said. "It is tough and lusty. Now let us play here on the bridge. Whoever shall fall in, the other shall win the battle."

"With all my whole heart!" replied the stranger. "I scorn to give out even in the very least."

So they fell to without more words, and each began to flourish his staff about. First Robin gave the stranger such a bang that it made his very bones ring.

"Thou must be repaid for that!" cried the stranger then. "I'll give you as good as you bring! So long as I am able to handle my staff, I scorn to die in your debt!"

Then each went to it so fast and furiously that it seemed as if they were threshing corn.

At last the stranger gave Robin so hard a crack on the crown that blood came. The sight of his own blood enraged Robin, and his blows became

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even more fierce. The stranger, however, gave Robin a mighty blow at last which tumbled him into the brook. Then the stranger stood back, his hands on his hips, and roared with laughter.

“Where art thou now, good fellow?” he cried merrily.

Robin could not keep from laughing also, though somewhat ruefully, for he was a good sportsman, and knew how to take defeat.

“Good faith!” he answered, sputtering a little, for a good deal of the water of the brook had gotten into his mouth and eyes. “I’m in the flood, and floating along with the tide!”

Then he shook the water out of his hair, and rubbed it out of his eyes, and presently made his way to the bank, and pulled himself up by a thorn-bush.

The stranger still stood on the bridge, gazing down at him.

“I must admit thou art a brave soul!” said Robin, looking at him admiringly. “I’ll no longer fight with thee! I needs must admit, too, that thou hast won the day, and so our battle is ended.”

With that he blew three loud blasts on his bugle.

Through the trees came running great numbers of men, all clad in Lincoln green, but no longer so shabby as they had been when Robin had become their leader. They came up quickly and surrounded him.

"Oh, what is the matter?" asked Will Stutely. "You are wet to the skin, good master!"

"No matter!" said Robin, laughing. He pointed to the tall stranger on the bridge. "That man in fighting tumbled me into the brook," he said with a chuckle at his own plight.

"Then indeed he shall not escape free!" cried Will, and two or three of the men ran toward the stranger with the evident intention of serving him as he had served their master. Robin, however, stopped them with a glance.

"No," he said, "forbear! He's a stout fellow." Then he spoke courteously to the stranger: "Be not afraid, good friend! No one shall harm thee! These men wait upon me, and there are five times as many as are here. Wilt thou be one of us? Speak up, thou jolly blade, and never fear! I'll teach you the use of the bow, and to shoot at the fallow deer."

The stranger gave a great roar of good-natured

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laughter, and strode across the bridge to where Robin stood.

“Here’s my hand!” he cried, offering Robin a huge paw. “I’ll serve you with all my whole heart! My name is John Little. Doubt not that I shall play my part well.”

“John Little!” repeated Will Stutely, gazing at the man’s huge figure. “John *Little!*” And at that Robin and all his men roared with laughter.

John Little looked slightly offended.

“No, now,” said Will Stutely in a tone of apology, laying his hand on the giant’s arm, “I will be thy godfather, and rebaptize thee. Thy name suits thee ill, and must needs be altered. Come, we will have a christening feast.”

Then gayly the outlaws turned back into the forest, and in one of their accustomed gathering places, a feast was prepared. A pair of fat does were roasted by the fire, and cups of wine were produced. They called it, as Will Stutely had proposed, a christening feast; and John Little was put in the place of honor at Robin’s right hand.

After they had eaten and drunk their fill, Will cried:

“ This infant here was called John Little; but we’ll change the order of the words, and wherever he shall go hereafter, he shall be called Little John! ”

Then they all made the forest ring with a great shouting of “ Little John! Little John! ” and Robin presented his new follower with what he called his christening robes, a suit of Lincoln green. He gave Little John also a long bow and a quiver full of arrows.

“ Thou shalt be as good an archer as the best,” Robin said to him; “ and thou shalt roam through the greenwood with the rest of us. We live here like lords although we don’t own a foot of land. We feast on good cheer, however, and have everything we wish.”

So the christening feast ended, and ever afterwards, in spite of the fact that he was seven feet tall, the newcomer was called Little John.

IV

HOW ROBIN BECAME A BUTCHER

ROBIN and his men came to be a constant thorn in the flesh of the Sheriff of Nottingham. That worthy man considered himself the representative of the majesty of the law, as indeed he was at Nottingham, but it is doubtful whether even the King took himself quite so seriously as did the Sheriff. Time passed, and Robin's band grew in numbers and in strength, until it seemed as if they could do as they pleased.

Robin and his merry men knew right well the feelings of the Sheriff towards them; and, of course, they took delight in teasing him. It came to be no uncommon thing for one or more of them to go disguised into Nottingham, and play some merry trick upon the Sheriff and his followers. What made it harder for the Sheriff was that practically all the people of the town and of the country round loved and protected Robin and his men.

At last, in desperation, the Sheriff set a reward

on Robin's head. If the chief offender were caught, he reasoned, it ought to be an easy matter to capture the rest. When the outlaws heard of this proclamation, they raised a great shout of laughter, Robin's voice loudest of all.

"So!" he said, with twinkling eyes. "The Sheriff will have my head! Well, who knows? Perhaps before a twelvemonth is passed, I may have his instead!"

It was a lovely summer morning. Robin stood under the spreading branches of his favorite oak tree. Some of his men sat or lay on the ground near by. Little John sprawled at his full mighty length at Robin's feet.

"Say but the word, master," said Little John in a lazy voice, "say but the word, and we two will go and bring back the Sheriff's head, so ending this foolish matter."

"Hark! What was that?" said Robin suddenly, instead of replying.

The sound he had heard was the loud, fierce barking of a dog. All the men scrambled to their feet; but scarcely had the words left Robin's lips than a cut-tailed dog came tearing through the trees, and made straight for Robin's face.

"Ha! An ungracious cur!" said Robin

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calmly, seizing the dog by the throat, and throwing him gasping into the bushes near by. "Is this thy master following?"

He gave a quick signal to his men to leave. When a glossy mare came trotting along the rough forest pathway, no one was in sight except Robin himself leaning against the great oak tree.

The mare's rider was evidently a butcher. Numerous joints of meat were fastened neatly to the saddle, and others filled the baskets that were slung along the horse's back. The rider was a fat jolly man, with a red face and a shining skin.

"Good-morrow, friend!" said Robin, stepping suddenly into the man's way, and seizing the mare's bridle. "What food hast thou, tell me? Tell me also thy trade and where thou livest, for I like thy company well."

The butcher had grown red with rage at this sudden halt in his progress.

"No matter where I dwell!" he said curtly. "I am a butcher, and I am going into Nottingham to sell my meats."

At that moment there was a forlorn yelp from the bushes, and an instant later the dog who had tried to attack Robin came limping out.

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“Vice, my poor Vice!” cried the butcher. “Who hath ill-treated thee?” and he glared suspiciously at Robin.

“Thy dog is well named,” said Robin coolly.

“I believe it was thou that did ill-treat him!” said the butcher angrily. “He did thee no harm.”

“If he did not, it was no fault of his,” said Robin.

“Now by all the saints in heaven,” cried the butcher, getting down from his mare, and seizing his quarter-staff, “thou shalt have three good blows for what thou hast done!”

He looked so funny as he stood there, red and fuming, that Robin could hardly keep from laughing.

“Thy dog flew straight for my throat, good butcher,” he said in a peaceable tone. “I had to defend myself. Tell me what is the price of this good meat that thou hast here to sell, and what is the price of thy mare? I would like to be a butcher—for a while!” A sudden idea had occurred to him which made his eyes twinkle with merriment.

The butcher’s angry brow smoothed itself out, and he let his staff fall to the ground.

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“The price of my meat,” he answered, “with my bonny mare—well, thou must give me four marks for them, and they are not dear at that. As for the dog——”

“No, I want not the dog,” said Robin hastily. “Nor do I think he wants me as a master either. For thy meats and for thy mare, and for that fresh apron that thou wearest, I will give thee five marks. Is it agreed?”

The butcher agreed, in a very friendly manner now. A moment later he departed on foot, jingling his money in his pocket, and with his dog under his arm; and very shortly afterwards, a handsome young butcher, wearing an apron several sizes too large for him, was trotting gayly on his mare towards Nottingham.

It was market day in the town, and tradesmen of many kinds were entering Nottingham from all directions. There were other butchers, of course, besides Robin; and in order not to show how little he knew of their trade, he mixed among them, watching them, and asking occasional questions. Finally he took up his place with a group of others, just before the Sheriff's house. Like those about him, Robin spread forth his meats, and began to call out how good they were. So

far he had played his part well, and no one had suspected that he was other than he seemed; but now he did something that attracted both interest and suspicion to him.

“Buy my good fresh meat!” cried Robin gayly. “Here, gentle dames and pretty lasses! Who wants three pennyworth of meat for one?”

At first, everyone thought he was joking; but when the maids and matrons who were marketing discovered that he spoke the sober truth, and that he was indeed selling his meats for a third of their value, naturally everyone flocked to this new and handsome young butcher.

“Surely,” the other butchers whispered among themselves, “surely this is some rogue who has sold his father’s lands.”

Word passed from one to another of the great bargains that the new butcher was offering; and presently, anxious to share in these, forth from the Sheriff’s house came Mrs. Sheriff herself.

“Ah, Mistress Sheriff!” said Robin with a winning smile. “Hast come to share in the good luck that I have brought to Nottingham this day? Now, here is a fine tender bit of beef that I have saved especially for thee. I am a young butcher, Mistress Sheriff,” he continued with a modest air

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that was very becoming to his handsome face. "I beg thee, good Mistress Sheriff, see thou that none wrong me!" and he gazed at her appealingly.

"Thou art very welcome to Nottingham!" said the Sheriff's wife graciously, well pleased with the fine piece of beef Robin said he had saved for her. When she offered to pay for it, moreover, he refused to take a penny, and she left, in better humor than ever; for although the Sheriff loved good eating, he liked not so well to pay for it.

In a few minutes more Robin's meats were all sold, and he turned gayly to his fellows.

"It has been a good market day, friends!" he said.

Some of them shook their heads doubtfully at this mad butcher, more than ever convinced he was a rogue.

"Come here," said one of them, beckoning to him. "We are all of one trade. Wilt dine with us?"

"Indeed I will go with you," cried Robin cheerfully, "as fast as I can."

So presently they all sat down together at dinner in the Sheriff's house. There under the

Sheriff's very nose sat Robin, and chuckled within himself to think what a fine tale he would have to tell his merry men when he got back to Sherwood.

"Let our new brother say grace!" said one of the butchers; and Robin very devoutly crossed himself and said:

"Pray God bless us all and our meat within this place. A good cup of sack will warm our blood. So ends my grace. Amen!"

Then he cried:

"Come, fill us more wine, and let us be merry! No matter how much the bill is, I swear I will pay it!"

Then the butchers were more than ever convinced that he was a rogue; but they were nothing loath to accept his hospitality. So they ate and drank and made merry.

"This is a mad fellow indeed!" thought the cautious butchers, all the while that they were enjoying Robin's generosity. After a time, the Sheriff noticed the newcomer, and the butcher sitting nearest him told him of what he called Robin's mad tricks.

The Sheriff's shrewd eyes narrowed.

"He is some rogue, no doubt," he said. "Maybe he hath sold his lands, and is now trying

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to spend all the gold and silver he received for them.”

He leaned forward, and addressed the strange young butcher, seated midway down the table.

“Hast any beasts to sell me, good fellow?” he asked in a would-be gracious manner.

“Yes, that I have, good Master Sheriff,” replied Robin, with great apparent eagerness. “I have two or three hundred of them.”

“Ah!” said the Sheriff slowly. He looked at Robin searchingly. He did not for one moment recognize the outlaw; for he had never before met him. He was turning over in his grasping mind how he might best rob this rogue.

“A hundred acres of good land I have also, if it please you to come see it, Master Sheriff,” continued Robin. “I’ll sell that to you also.”

“H’m!” said the Sheriff thoughtfully. “Well, good fellow, I will see these beasts and that land.”

“So please your worship, it will like me well to lead you thither,” answered Robin, all the while thinking what a tale this would be for him and his merry men to laugh over!

“Stay here overnight as my guest,” said the

Sheriff graciously. "To-morrow morn I will go with thee to see thy beasts and thy land."

"I will do so, and I thank your worship heartily," replied Robin.

So it chanced that Robin Hood, on whose head a price had been set, passed that night in the best room in the Sheriff's house. He slept, however, very little. He would wake every once in a while to chuckle with delight at the thought of the joke he was playing on the Sheriff.

Early the next morning Robin and the Sheriff started off together. When the Sheriff noted that they were riding in the direction of Sherwood, he turned pale and halted his horse.

"God save us this day," he cried piously, "from a man they call Robin Hood!"

"Amen!" said Robin devoutly as they entered the forest.

They rode a little farther, and presently no less than a hundred good red deer went scampering past them.

"How like you my horned beasts, good Master Sheriff?" asked Robin. "They are fat and fair to see, as I promised you."

The Sheriff looked at him with dawning suspicion.

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“ I tell thee, good fellow,” he said uneasily, “ I would I were gone. Somehow I like not thy company.”

Then of a sudden Robin set his horn to his lips, and blew three blasts.

In an instant, as it seemed, the trees, the bushes, the very undergrowth, were all alive with archers.

“ What is your will, good master? ” cried Little John, who was nearest, and at the word he and all the others bent the knee to Robin.

“ Faith! ” cried Robin merrily, glancing at the Sheriff who sat shivering and pale on his horse. “ I have brought hither the Sheriff of Nottingham to dine with us! ”

Then all the merry men raised a great shout of laughter, and doffed their caps mockingly to the Sheriff.

“ He is welcome! ” said Little John solemnly. “ I hope, however, master, he will honestly pay for his dinner. I know he has plenty of gold.”

“ Doubtless thou art right, Little John,” answered Robin. “ Wilt see, my trusty friend? Take his cloak, and count into it what he hath in his purse.”

Thereat the Sheriff’s cloak was most courteously removed, and spread on the ground, and

Robin's bidding was done. Alas for the Sheriff! his purse was well filled that day; for he had gone forth expecting to drive a sharp bargain with the foolish rogue whom he had taken Robin to be. After the three hundred pounds in his purse had been taken, Robin bade his men make dinner ready, for since he had dined with the Sheriff, the courtesy must be returned. So the Sheriff was well feasted in the forest, but he had little appetite for the good cheer, thinking of the jest that had been played upon him.

When dinner was over, Robin himself led the Sheriff through the forest, and set him on his horse of dapple gray.

“Remember me to your good wife, Master Sheriff!” cried Robin, laughing as he waved his cap at the Sheriff's back. “Tell her I will save another good piece of meat for her when again I go as butcher to Nottingham!”

V

HOW ROBIN MET WILL SCARLET

“**W**HAT time of the day is’t, Little John?” asked Robin Hood yawning.

“Methinks ’tis in the prime,” replied Little John.

“Then ’tis time for us to go through the greenwood, and hunt for our dinner,” said Robin rising and seizing his bow. “Methinks there are no victuals in our pantry.”

The two strode off together.

Presently, as they walked along through the forest, they saw a handsome young man coming towards them. His doublet was of silk, his hose of scarlet, and he was a goodly youth to behold that fine summer’s day.

At the same moment, Little John and Robin saw something else—a herd of deer scampering a short distance away. Their hands flew to their bows, and each fitted an arrow to the string when they heard the stranger say:

“Now the best of ye I will have for my dinner, and that within a little space, too!”

Forthwith he bent his bow, and without more ado, he slew the best buck in the herd at a distance of forty yards.

“Well shot, well shot!” quoth Robin gayly, going forward to the stranger. “That shot was shot in good time for thee, but ill for us, since we too thought to have that buck for our dinner. Thou art worthy, methinks, friend, to be one of my yeomen. Wilt accept the place?”

He spoke with his hand outstretched; but the stranger responded only by a contemptuous look.

“Run away, run away, thou foolish fellow!” he said. “Make haste and go quickly, or with my fist I’ll give thee such store of buffets as thou hast never felt.”

Robin felt his anger rising at the stranger’s tone and manner.

“Thou hadst best not buffet me,” he said quietly. “If I blow this,” and he touched his bugle, “I can bring those who will take my part.”

The stranger gazed at him with a haughty air.

“Thou hadst best not blow thy horn, be thou in ever so much haste to do so,” he said calmly. “If thou dost, I can quickly cut the blast with my good broadsword.”

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Then without further words, the two as if with one consent bent their bows. Then Robin lowered his bow.

“Oh, hold thy hand, hold thy hand!” said Robin, his good humor quite restored, for he loved a gallant foe. “To shoot further is vain indeed. If we shoot one at the other, one of us will surely be slain. Let us instead take our swords and shields, and go under yon tree.”

“As I hope to be saved,” said the stranger stubbornly, “I will not go one foot with thee.”

His ungracious behavior angered Robin greatly. He dealt the stranger a sudden blow which took the latter by surprise, and made him reel. When he recovered himself, he was crimson with fury.

“Thou didst never deal a blow that shall be better paid!” he cried; and with that he took his staff and dealt Robin such a buffet that the blood ran trickling from every hair of his head.

It was Robin’s turn to reel under the blow.

“God a mercy, good fellow!” he cried. “For this that thou hast done, prithee tell me who thou art and where thou dost dwell.”

At that moment Little John, who had been standing watchfully by and letting Robin attend



Little John seized the stranger's staff.

(See page 69)

to his own affairs, thought it was time to interfere. He strode forward, and seized the stranger's staff in his iron grip.

"Who thou mayst be I know not," he said; "but sooth thou shalt not murder my master while I stand here."

The stranger answered Little John only by a contemptuous glance; but he spoke to Robin more mildly than he had yet done.

"Ay, I will tell thee," he said. "I was born and bred in Maxfield, and my name is Game-well." He paused a moment, glanced around him cautiously, and continued in a lower voice. "By accident I killed my father's steward," he said, "and I am searching now for one—Robin Hood."

"And why for him?" asked Robin, and Little John wondered why his eyes were so bright.

"Because," answered the young man, "he is my cousin. 'Tis said he dwells here in the forest. Knowest thou where he is?"

"Methinks I can guide thee to him, if the aching head thou hast given me will let me. Art thou indeed Robin Hood's cousin?"

"So I have told thee," said the stranger, some of his impatience of manner showing again.

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“Robin Hood is really the Earl of Huntingdon had he his rights, as no doubt thou knowest,” he said; “and I”—he spoke very simply, so that the words were not so haughty as they might otherwise have sounded—“I am the son of the Earl of Maxfield,” he said.

“Then say no more!” cried Robin joyously, flinging his arms around the stranger’s neck. “Thou art indeed Robin Hood’s cousin, and I am Robin Hood! Welcome, kinsman, to the greenwood.”

So they embraced each other, and accompanied by Little John, went along together through the forest.

“Kinsman or not,” muttered Little John to himself, “’tis not right that he should have so beaten our master and yet go unpunished. Perchance I may have a bout with him one day, and try whether he can beat me!”

Then Robin blew his horn and summoned his merry men, and told them that his kinsman had come to join them in the forest.

“He shall be bold yeoman of mine,” said Robin; “my chief man next to Little John, and we’ll be three of the bravest outlaws in the North Country. Now will we eat the fat buck that my

cousin all unwittingly killed for our dinner as well as his."

So they all began to get the dinner ready, and after a while sat down to the feast. Then Robin said, smiling as he looked at his cousin seated in the place of honor on his right:

"Thou must be newly christened as is our custom here in the greenwood, cousin." He paused, and looked the handsome fellow over from head to foot. "Those scarlet hose of thine become thee well," he said. "Henceforth then thou shalt be no more Will Gamewell, but Will Scarlet."

VI

HOW ROBIN WON THE GOLDEN ARROW

“**A**ND so,” said Robin, his eyes twinkling, “so my friend, the Sheriff of Nottingham, is uneasy again. Perchance he enjoyed his dinner with us, and would like another here in the forest.”

Robin was seated under his favorite oak tree; his bow, arrows and staff lying within reach. Little John was perched on a massive stump near by, busily engaged in mending an arrow. Will Scarlet lay on the ground, his hands clasped beneath his head, his eyes fixed dreamily on the sky seen through the network of branches overhead. Will Stutely was measuring off some yards of green cloth, as he kneeled under a tree near by; for it was almost time for the men to have new suits.

“Mayhap,” said Will Scarlet, in reply to Robin, “mayhap thou art right. What is the latest news of our dear Sheriff?”

“Why,” said Robin, “one of my men brought

me word that the Sheriff hath announced an archery contest in Nottingham. Now it is as plain as the great nose on thy face, Little John, that he would not proclaim an archery contest did he not expect good archers to attend it. We are good archers. Therefore, the Sheriff doth mean by this announcement that he desires our company; not, I fear me, however, to do us good or to wish us well."

"Well, why should we not answer the invitation?" said Little John, dropping his arrow into his quiver, and rising with so mighty a yawn and stretch that he looked nearly twice his seven feet of height. "'Twere shame to disappoint our dear Sheriff. Mayhap he desires to return the hospitality we showed him. Is there a prize?"

"Ay, so I am told," said Robin; "a dainty toy enough. 'Tis an arrow with a golden head and a shaft of silver."

"'Twould look well in thy quiver, cousin, methinks," said Will Scarlet. "Let us go to Nottingham, say I."

"What sayst thou, Will Stutely?" asked Robin, turning to his oldest follower.

Will Stutely raised his head from his measuring, and looked doubtful.

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“’Twere pity,” he said slowly, “to be caught in a trap. This match is but an evil trick on the Sheriff’s part. Why be so easily deceived? Be ruled by me, master. Do not stir from the greenwood.”

“Nay,” answered Robin pleasantly, “much as I love thee, Will, I think thy words are too timid. We are not deceived. We understand the Sheriff perfectly. ’Twill be the greater sport to outwit him. Come what will, I’ll try my skill at this archery contest.”

“Ay, let us go thither,” said Little John, picking up his huge bow and beginning to test it; “but we need not be recognized, master. Let us leave behind us our mantles of Lincoln green, and one shall wear white, another red, another yellow, another blue. So shall we not be known, and our good friend the Sheriff will think his trap has been set in vain.”

“Bravo, Little John!” cried Robin, “We’ll do as thou sayst, and have a hearty bout with the Sheriff’s men. Moreover we will not go together, but will mix separately among the crowd.”

The day of the archery contest dawned bright and clear. Nottingham was gay with banners and flags, and the streets were filled with people

in holiday dress. The field for the archery contest swarmed with a crowd of eight hundred or more. In the place of honor, on a platform at one end of the field, sat the Sheriff and his wife. The targets were ready, and a great many archers were on hand to try their skill. Presently the Sheriff and his wife took their places, and the shooting began.

Robin and his men had done as they had planned. Not a man among the archers was in Lincoln green. The Sheriff cast a searching glance at the crowd of contestants as he took his place, and gave a sigh of disappointment. He could see neither Robin nor any that looked like a follower of his.

There were many good archers in the crowd other than the outlaws from Sherwood. It was speedily noted by the eager spectators, however, that there were certain men whose arrows always were in or near the centre. One of these archers especially, a tall fellow in red, performed several times the most difficult feat of all—slitting the willow wand. There were two or three others who met with the admiration of the onlookers—one in white, another in yellow, a third in blue.

“Blue Jacket! Blue Jacket!” cried the peo-

ple, as a tall fellow seven feet in height pierced the very centre of the target. "Nay, nay, bravo, Yellow Coat!" shouted another group admiringly, as a second archer nicked the arrow which Blue Jacket had just sent home.

"Red hath no equal!" said one of the archers who were taking part. "The Sheriff will have no difficulty in awarding the prize. Yon fellow is methinks the finest archer that England can boast!"

"Indeed," murmured another, "if Robin Hood and his men were here, none of them could beat this brave shooting."

The Sheriff's heart was as lead with disappointment. Successful as was the contest and great as were the feats that were performed, his object had not been gained. Robin and his men had not ventured from Sherwood.

"Ay, I thought he would be here," he muttered to himself. "He is said to be brave, but 'tis plain he dare not appear."

The tall victor in scarlet standing before him to receive the prize, caught the words, and a smile touched his lips.

"Take, good fellow," said the Sheriff with a sigh, "this prize for thy noble archery—an arrow

with a shaft of silver and a head of gold. Thou hast shot well this day, and I dare swear no archer in England can beat thee."

As they had gone to Nottingham, so the merry men came back to Sherwood; not in a company, but by twos and threes. Robin was the last to arrive, bearing stuck through his belt the prize arrow. A great shout of welcome greeted him, and he saw that a feast had been prepared, and they were only waiting his coming to begin. Little John, still in blue, was already seated. Will Scarlet, in yellow, waved his hand to Robin merrily.

"Welcome to the archer whom none other in England can surpass!" quoth he merrily. "Our friend the Sheriff spoke better than he knew."

"'Twas a brave day indeed!" said Little John. "Only I would that we might have tried our aim on the Sheriff himself. We shall never be left in peace until we have rid ourselves of him."

"'Twas noble shooting, master," said Will Stutely, who had been present although he had taken no part in the contest. "Methinks both thy merry men and thou have done right well."

"Ay," said Robin, but he spoke rather listlessly, and his face was clouded. When his fol-

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lowers shouted, "A health to our master, the winner of the golden arrow!" his expression did not change, although he bowed his thanks.

"I am glad, comrades, the prize hath come to Sherwood," he said slowly. "Nevertheless ——" He sighed.

"What is it, master?" asked Little John anxiously; for the giant was devoted to Robin.

Robin answered rather crossly. After all, he was still very young.

"Well," he said, "I want the Sheriff to know certainly that it was I who won his arrow."

"Ha! ha! is that all?" cried Little John, with a great roar of relief. "Well, then, master, I will tell thee what to do, and thou didst find my counsel good before. Wilt allow me then to advise thee again?"

"Speak on, Little John," said Robin, smiling affectionately at his best-loved follower. "Thou art clever and shrewd. I know no man among us who hath so much wit."

"Well, then," said Little John gravely, "my advice is that a note be written to the Sheriff, and when it is finished that it shall be sent to him."

"That is well said," said Robin; but he looked

a trifle puzzled. "When it is writ, however, in what manner shall it be sent?"

"Pish!" cried Little John airily, waving his huge hand. "Leave that to me. Write thou the message, for thou knowest I have no clerkly skill. Then I will deliver it to the Sheriff."

"But how?" persisted Robin. "I would not have thee risk thy life for this whim of mine."

"Why," said Little John, gazing at him reproachfully, "dost forget what archers we have proved ourselves to-day? When the letter is writ, I will e'en stick it on the point of my arrow, and shoot it into the Sheriff's house; ay, even on to his table while he sits at meat. Hurry, master! 'Twill be a rare jest!"

While the outlaws feasted in the forest, the Sheriff sat gloomily at his supper in Nottingham. He was disappointed. The aim of the archery contest had been to catch Robin Hood; and it had failed.

Suddenly as he sat waiting for the pudding to be brought in, he heard the quick whiz of an arrow. Then he saw one fly through the open window and rest quivering on the table before him.

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The point of the arrow had been thrust through a tiny note. He reached forward and took it, trembling as he did so.

When he read the note, however, he grew fairly purple with rage; yet it was very brief:

Robin Hood thanks the Sheriff of Nottingham for the prize of the Golden Arrow.

VII

HOW ROBIN MET FRIAR TUCK

IT was summer time. The leaves were green and the flowers fresh and gay. The spirit of the season had entered into Robin and his men, and they were making merry together. Some were having a leaping match. Others were testing their endurance in running. The greatest number, however, were engaged in their favorite sport, and were having a contest at archery.

“Come, come!” bellowed Little John, who was acting as Master of Ceremonies. “Now which of you is a good archer and can draw a good bow? Which of you can kill a deer? Who can kill one five hundred feet away? Come now, come now, ye merry men, and show your skill!”

So challenged, there followed such an exhibition as might well have made the Sheriff tremble, had he been there to see. Will Scarlet killed a deer, Will Stutely another, and Little John himself accepted the last part of his own challenge, and killed one five hundred feet away.

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“God’s blessing on thy heart!” cried Robin, his admiration, always free and generous, aroused especially by Little John’s noble shot. “God’s blessing on thy heart, I say, that hath shot such a shot for me! I would ride my horse a hundred miles to find thy match!”

Then Will Scarlet began to laugh heartily.

“There is a friar in Fountains Abbey, master,” he said, “who will beat both him and thee. He can well draw a strong bow, and methinks if all of us were lined up together, he could with ease outdo every one of us.”

Robin stared at him in wonder.

“I have just been thinking,” he said, “that there were not such archers in all England, and good sooth, my heart was like to burst with joy and pride, but if what thou sayst be true, by Our Lady, Will, I will neither eat nor drink until I have seen this friar.”

Without more ado, he put on his armor and his steel helmet, took his sword and shield and his bow with a quiverful of arrows, and so set out for Fountains Abbey.

When he reached the place, he saw a stout friar walking beside the water. He was strangely attired for a friar. As he walked to and fro, his

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gown swung back with the motion, and Robin saw that he was clad in complete armor. Like Robin, he wore a steel helmet and a sword and shield hung by his side.

Robin approached nearer to him.

“Carry me over the water, Friar!” he said with seeming fierceness. “If thou dost not, thy life shall pay for thy refusal!”

The big fellow glanced him over coolly.

“Well,” said the friar, heaving a loud sigh, “the blessed St. Christopher refused not to ford the stream in kindness; and it would ill beseem a humble friar to do so.” And without more words, he knelt, and offered his broad shoulders for Robin to climb. Robin did so, chuckling inwardly, and the friar, gathering his frock about him, plunged into the stream. He trod through the deep waters right manfully, with a firm, even step, and not a word did he speak until Robin was safely on the other side, and had leaped lightly down from his shoulders.

“Wait, friend!” said the friar, holding out a huge hand. “’Tis thy turn now! Carry me back again over this stream to the spot where thou didst first find me, my fine fellow, and if thou dost refuse, I promise thee a good beating.”

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Robin looked uncertain whether to laugh or to be angry at this turning of the tables.

“Nay ——” he began. Then his sense of fair play made him change his mind. “Thou’rt right,” he said. “Mount thy steed, good fellow!” and in his turn, he knelt and let the friar climb on his shoulders.

Robin’s task was a harder one, however, than the friar’s had been. The latter was a much heavier burden, and besides Robin did not know the stream. When at length he landed the friar on the bank whence they had started, he heaved a sigh of relief.

“Thy turn again!” he panted with twinkling eyes, not really expecting that the friar would take him at his word.

The friar, however, again stooped obediently to act as Robin’s steed, and once more waded out into the water. This time he paused in the middle of the stream.

“Now sink or swim!” he cried, and with a sudden movement of his shoulders he heaved Robin into the water, and stood laughing with hands on his hips.

Robin was a good swimmer, and he reached the bank with little difficulty. The friar followed



He heaved Robin into the water, and stood laughing with arms akimbo.



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him, roaring with a jolly laugh. Then he and Robin, their clothes dripping, stood eyeing each other. Finally Robin lifted his bow, and let fly an arrow at the friar. The other stooped for his steel shield, and from it the arrow glanced off harmlessly.

“Shoot on, shoot on, thou fine fellow!” he cried tauntingly. “Shoot on as thou hast begun!”

And he added:

“I will not run away from thee if thou shoot here all day long!”

Robin realized that the friar spoke the truth. His coat of mail made him safe from any arrow. Nevertheless Robin was angered by the way the friar had outwitted him and by his insolent manner. He lost his head, and foolishly continued to shoot. The friar caught all his arrows on his shield.

When his arrows were all gone, Robin with a furious cry called to the friar to use his sword as well as his shield. With the words he drew his own. Then the two began to fight with might and main.

From ten o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon, it is said that Robin and the friar

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fought with swords, and at the end of that time it remained an even battle. At last Robin, much tired, fell to his knees.

“A boon!” he panted. “A boon, thou Friar! Give me leave to set my horn to my mouth, and blow three blasts!”

“That will I do!” said the friar contemptuously. “I hope thou wilt blow so well that both thine eyes shall fall out!”

With this encouraging wish, Robin set his horn to his lips and blew his usual signal to his men. As always it was speedily answered. In an instant, as it seemed, half a hundred men, with bows held ready, came running towards Robin and the friar.

The friar turned rather pale.

“What men are these who come so quickly?” he said.

“They are mine, Friar,” said Robin. “What is that to thee?”

“A boon I crave in my turn!” said the friar quickly. “I gave thee the like. Give me now leave to set my fingers to my mouth and whistle three times.”

“That boon will I grant thee,” said Robin; “or else I were to blame.”

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Then the friar set his fingers to his mouth, and whistled three times; and in answer to the summons came running towards him half a hundred fierce dogs.

“Here’s for every man of thine a dog of mine!” cried the friar. “And as for thee I will myself be the hound that lays thee low!”

“Nay, by my faith, Friar,” said Robin, “that may not be!”

As if to make his words vain, however, two of the fierce curs made for him at once, one behind, one before, and in a moment, his mantle of Lincoln green was torn from his back.

At this the good outlaws began shooting, but whether they shot east, west, north or south, it did little good. The dogs were so well trained that as the arrows were shot, the dogs caught them in their mouths, and carried them to the friar.

“Call off thy dogs!” cried Little John at length. He was shooting desperately even while he spoke. “Friar, heed my bidding, and call off thy dogs!”

“What man art thou,” retorted the friar, “who hast come hither to talk with me?”

“My name is Little John,” replied the other,

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and his voice was stern. "I speak no lie. If thou call not off thy dogs now, I will show both them and thee what I can do."

Little John was as good as his word. He kept on shooting with might and main, and presently ten of the fierce dogs lay dead.

"Hold thy hand, good fellow!" said the friar then, with respect in his voice for the first time. "Thy master and I will agree. What wouldst thou?" he went on, looking at Robin.

Now gallant men like gallant foes, and Robin had become much interested in the fighting friar and his trained dogs.

"If thou wilt leave Fountains Abbey," he said, "and join my men, and say Mass for us, and be our Chaplain, thou shalt have a gold piece every Sunday through the year, and new garments for every holy day. Methinks a friar like thee would be well suited to our band. What sayst thou?"

"Ay, so I will!" cried the friar, seizing Robin's hand in a mighty grip. "I will go with thee. Thy fellows and thou I like well. I will take along my dogs, and thou shalt see, they will be gentle as lambs towards ye all."

So the friar and his dogs accompanied Robin and his men back to Sherwood.

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“ I know not thy name,” said Robin to the Friar as they passed along, “ and thou needest not to tell me, for we usually give new names to those who join us. Now because thou didst tuck up thy frock around thee when thou didst bear me through the stream, and afterwards when thou didst fight with me, thou shalt be known among us as Friar Tuck.”

And so he was; and by that name he has come down to us in all the songs and stories about Robin and his men.

VIII

HOW LITTLE JOHN TORMENTED THE SHERIFF

“MASTER,” said Little John, one bright summer morning not long after Friar Tuck had joined the band of merry men in Sherwood, “master, methinks I should like to go shooting to-day. I hear that there is again to be a match in Nottingham.”

Robin looked at him sharply.

“As thou wilt, Little John,” he said after an instant. “Look well to thyself, however, for it would grieve me sore to lose thee out of my band.”

“I thank thee, master,” answered Little John calmly. “I will heed thy words. Be not alarmed, however, if I do not come back to-night. I have a little trick in mind that I would play on our sweet Sheriff, and it may take me several days to do so. Give me a fortnight ere thou send any in search of me.”

“A fortnight!” echoed Robin, somewhat dis-

mayed. "Why, the Sheriff might have thee hanged by that time."

"Fear not!" said Little John cheerfully. "The hemp hath not been woven with which the Sheriff shall hang me!"

"Well, go thy ways!" cried Robin, clapping him on the shoulder. "God send thee safe back to us, say I!"

"And I!" added Friar Tuck, who was at the moment devouring a great chunk of venison, as he sat cross-legged on the turf.

Little John nodded gravely to them both in acknowledgment of their good wishes, and without more ado he strode off through the forest in the direction of Nottingham.

Again the town was in holiday attire, although the occasion was not so elaborate a merrymaking as the day when Robin had won the golden arrow. The same broad level meadow was the scene of the shooting-match, but there were not nearly so many present either among archers or audience, as on the other occasion. Little John's great height always made him conspicuous; so he had dressed as quietly as possible in sober brown, and he went stoopingly in order to make himself look shorter. He joined the little band of con-

testants, and began to shoot. It was not long before his extraordinarily good aim made him conspicuous.

“Pray, what is the prize, friend, in this contest?” he asked courteously of the man next him in the line of those who were shooting.

“’Tis said the Sheriff wishes a good marksman as a servant in his household,” replied the other, and wondered why this tall, stooping fellow grinned so oddly in answer. “Ever since he had that trick played upon him by Robin Hood when the outlaw won the golden arrow, His Worship hath desired additional protection, ’tis said.”

“Ah, is’t so?” purred Little John softly. “’Twill be a noble prize and one worth striving for; since no doubt he that serves the Sheriff will lie softly, eat good food, and drink fine wine. Is’t not so?”

The other man had no time to reply, for he was called for his turn at the target. The archers were now slitting the willow wand, which was considered one of the most difficult feats of archery. It was, however, mere child’s play to any of Robin Hood’s men, since it was a shot they were constantly practising. Three times the archers were called on to slit the wand, and each time

Little John did so, not only with ease, but even with apparent carelessness. The Sheriff, seated on the platform overlooking the field, noted approvingly the fine shooting of the stoop-shouldered fellow in brown.

“Him will I select as my servant,” he thought to himself. “Robin Hood shoots not better. With this fellow as protector in my household I shall feel safe.”

When for the third time Little John’s arrow slit the willow wand exactly in two, the Sheriff rose in his place.

“This is the best archer I ever saw!” he exclaimed.—“Save one,” he added under his breath, thinking of Robin Hood. “Come hither, fellow.”

The large stoop-shouldered fellow slouched over to the platform, and touched his forelock with respect.

“Say now, thou sturdy fellow,” said the Sheriff pompously, “what is thy name, and in what county wert thou born? Also where dost thou dwell now?”

“I was born in Holderness, sir,” answered the big archer meekly. “Men call me Reynold Greenleaf.”

“Well then, Reynold Greenleaf,” said the Sheriff, “wilt come and dwell in my household? I will give thee twenty marks a year.”

“So please you,” quoth the man in brown, “I already have a master, a courteous knight. It might be better if thou wouldst get permission of him to let me be thy man.”

“Well, let that be,” said the Sheriff. “Stay thou with me for a month or so until we can get permission from thy master.”

“As thou wilt, Master Sheriff,” said the big archer meekly.

So Little John became the Sheriff's man, which was exactly the trick he had in mind when he left Sherwood, and his eyes twinkled as he followed his new master into the house.

“Now, so God help me,” he said to himself, “and by my true faith to my master, I shall be the worst servant to the Sheriff that he ever had!”

So Little John lay under a roof that night, and for seven nights thereafter, and he thought his mossy bed in the greenwood ill exchanged for those stifling walls. One day the Sheriff arose early and went hunting, and Little John remained in bed until noon. Then, feeling hungry,

he went down to the steward and asked for his dinner.

The steward scowled at him.

“Nay,” said he crossly in reply, “thou great hulking lazybones, why dost thou not rise with the rest of the household? Thou shalt neither eat nor drink until the Sheriff gets back from his hunting.”

“Nay, then,” quoth Little John cheerfully, “rather than wait so long, I vow I will crack thy crown.”

The steward gave an alarmed look at the huge fellow towering above him, and then beat a hasty retreat to the pantry, where he shut and bolted the door. Little John broke in the door with a single powerful kick, and then gave a playful box on the ear to the steward cowering within. Next he began to select deliberately of the best he could find to eat and drink.

While he sat eating and drinking comfortably, the steward slipped away and told the cook what had happened. The latter, Nick Much by name, a tall, powerful fellow almost as huge as Little John, came to the pantry door, and beheld Little John eating his breakfast-dinner.

“Thou art a shrewd hind,” said Much, survey-

ing the giant, "to dwell in any house and thus get thine own dinner."

With that he gave Little John a sharp crack on the head.

"By my troth," said Little John, blinking a little as he went on with the meal which Much's blow had interrupted, "that stroke of thine I like well. Thou art a bold man and a strong, me-thinks; and now that I have finished my dinner, I shall test thy skill."

With that he rose to his huge height, and drew his sword. Much, the cook, did likewise, and they began to fight together there in the but-tery.

At the end of an hour's good fighting, Little John lowered his sword.

"By my loyalty to my master," he said to Much, "thou art one of the best swordsmen I ever saw." He came closer to the cook and spoke very low: "Couldst thou shoot as well with the bow," he said, "thou shouldst to the greenwood with me. Two times in the year thou shouldst have a change of clothing, and every year thou shouldst have twenty marks from—Robin Hood!"

Much started at the name.

“Put up thy sword,” he answered. “We will be good friends.”

He nodded at Little John, and ran off to the kitchen. In a few moments he returned, bearing a dainty dish of stewed venison accompanied by bread and wine, and the two sat down together, and ate hungrily, for their combat had given them huge appetites. With their heads together they began to plan how they might join Robin Hood that very night.

“I will take with me,” said Much, “a gift for my new master.”

So they went to the Sheriff’s office, and Much helped himself to a good part of the Sheriff’s silver.

“God save thee, my dear master!” cried Little John gayly, as he and Much the cook burst in upon the merry men lying under the trees in the moonlight.

“Welcome, Little John!” said Robin, his face brightening with relief at sight of his best loved man. “Welcome also to this good yeoman who is with thee!”

“Welcome, Little John!” shouted the merry men, in a huge chorus.

“Now tell me, what tidings from Nottingham?” asked Robin when Little John and the newcomer had settled down comfortably among the rest of the outlaws.

“The Sheriff greets thee,” said Little John, “and sends thee his cook for thy service, and likewise some of his silver vessels and three hundred pounds!”

Then a great shout of laughter arose from the merry men, for well they knew that the Sheriff would never willingly do any such thing.

“I make my vow,” exclaimed Robin, “that it was never by the Sheriff’s free will that this good is come to me.”

“Wait, master,” said Little John mysteriously, “wait! There is more to come! First welcome this new man to the forest. His name is Much, and he is the son of a miller, and good sooth, but he is the dainty cook!”

Little John spent that night in the greenwood with his comrades. The next morning he went off alone at sunrise, and ran in the direction that he knew the Sheriff had taken. When he had gone about five miles, he met the Sheriff and his party. Little John knelt before the Sheriff.

“God save thee, my dear master!” he said sweetly.

“Reynold Greenleaf!” cried the Sheriff. “Where hast thou been?”

“I have been wandering through this forest, master,” replied Little John, “and therein have I seen the fairest sight that ever I saw—a green hart!”

“A green hart!” echoed the Sheriff, his eyes nearly starting from his head with amazement.

“Yes, master,” answered Little John, “a green hart; and what is more, some seven score of other green deer with him.”

“That sight I would like to see!” said the Sheriff, who had his fair share of curiosity.

“Come then, dear master,” said Little John, “come with me, and thou shalt see them also.”

The Sheriff, burning to see this wonder, turned his horse, and rode in the direction that Little John led. The latter ran briskly along, smiling to himself the while, and when they had gone about five miles, they saw a handsome man in Lincoln green standing under a great oak tree.

“Robin Hood!” gasped the Sheriff, and wheeled his horse sharply about; but Little John seized the bridle.

“Lo you!” he cried laughing. “Here is the green hart!” Then he called to Robin, “I have brought a guest to dinner, to try the skill of our new cook!”

“Welcome, Master Sheriff!” exclaimed Robin. “Welcome for the second time to the forest!”

The Sheriff was pale and quaking with fear, for well he knew that he was helpless. He was treated, however, with the utmost courtesy. He was assisted from his horse, and seated beside Robin under the great oak tree. When at length dinner was served you may imagine the Sheriff’s feelings when he saw his own cook, Much, bearing the dishes to the table, and when he found himself eating from his own silver!

All the afternoon, a long one to the Sheriff, Robin entertained him with songs and with stories, and with archery contests. When night fell, the Sheriff hoped that Robin would let him go; but not so.

“Thou shalt lie under this oak tree to-night, Sheriff,” said Robin gayly. “Mayst find thy mossy bed a pleasant one!”

“Methinks,” sighed the Sheriff, “’tis a harder bed than that of any friar in Merry England!”

“Nay,” said Robin, his eyes twinkling, “per-

chance I'll keep thee here a twelvemonth and make an outlaw of thee."

"Nay, Robin, nay!" pleaded the Sheriff in terror. "I pray thee rather than keep me here another night that thou cut off my head to-morrow. Let me go and I will be friends with thee!"

"Then if I let thee go to-morrow," said Robin, "thou must swear an oath on my bright sword that thou shalt never do me harm by water or by land; and if thou findest any of my men that thou wilt help them."

"Anything, anything, so thou wilt let me go!" muttered the Sheriff.

"Swear then!" said Robin sternly, holding towards the Sheriff the cross hilt of his sword; and his teeth chattering, the Sheriff swore as Robin had bidden him.

So the next morning Robin let him go back to Nottingham: but he put no great faith in the Sheriff's oath, and in that he was wise, as you shall hear later.

IX

HOW LITTLE JOHN WENT A-BEGGING

“SOME of you must a-begging go,” said Robin suddenly, as he walked along one of the forest paths one morning, his arm thrown affectionately across Little John’s shoulders. “Our stock of gold pieces is a trifle low because our guests at dinner of late have been worthy and needy, so we have given instead of gotten. Ay, some of you must go a-begging. Little John, it must be thou!” and he gave the good-natured giant a great blow on the back.

“As thou wilt, master,” answered Little John, never flinching under the blow which would have knocked a lesser man to the earth. “Stay!” He stopped short, and his eyes grew bright as he thought of a plan. “If I must a-begging go,” he said with a slight swagger, “I shall be a palmer, methinks. A palmer’s weeds would well become me. I will have a staff, master, of course, and a coat, and bags”—he sighed rap-

turously—"bags of all sorts. Being a palmer, I must have a cross on my shoulder ——"

"Go to the treasure cave, thou great baby!" cried Robin, giving him another great buffet on the ear. "Take whatever thou wilt to wear and carry, and see what thou canst fetch back to us again."

"A bag for my bread," murmured Little John happily, his eyes misty with his day-dream, "another for my cheese, and one for my pennies—nay, I shall get pounds, such a good beggar I shall be!" and with that he strolled merrily away in the direction of the cave.

Before he reached it, however, he paused, and stood a moment in deep thought; then turned and strode at a good pace in the direction of the high-road. His own suit of hunter's green was quite old and shabby, because it was nearing the time of year when Robin's men usually had new clothing. The prudent thought that had stopped him had been that instead of using one of the palmer's outfits in their store, he might exchange clothes with some one on the highroad, and so get rid of his old suit and gain a disguise at the same time. A palmer he had set his heart on being; so when he reached the road, he went gayly along, swinging

his staff and whistling, quite sure that God would send him his desire.

His faith was rewarded. Presently he saw coming towards him just such a palmer as Little John dreamed of being. The newcomer had three bags, and in all respects was dressed exactly as the giant outlaw had described to his master a short time since. Little John measured the palmer narrowly with his eye. There was only one disadvantage. The newcomer was a much smaller man than he. "But," said Little John to himself with a sigh, "I can meet few men who are of my height. Methinks I would best not let this chance pass me."

So he hailed the palmer cheerily.

"Give ye good day," he said. "Wilt change thy garb with me?" Little John always believed in going directly to the point.

The palmer glared suspiciously at Little John towering above him.

"How now?" he said with a disagreeable snarl. "What silly joke is this?"

"No joke, by the rood!" answered Little John. "Come, I am in earnest! I will give thee this handsome suit of Lincoln green that I am wearing in exchange for that shabby old gown

and those ancient bags of thine. Remember," he added, gazing lovingly at them for the while, "remember, I must have the bags—oh, empty, of course!" as the palmer clutched them tightly. "I shall soon fill them again!"

The old man gave him another suspicious glare, and hesitated; but Little John's air of confident expectation, added to his great height and bulk, had its effect. The palmer removed his shabby gown, although with grudging slowness, and Little John in return whipped off his green mantle and doublet and hose, and handed them over in exchange. A moment or two, and they stood dressed in each other's clothes; but Little John was decidedly the worse off; for although his clothes hung on the palmer, the palmer's rags were far too small for him. The sleeves of the gown did not reach his wrist, and the shabby shoes had been patched at least nine times.

"Cursed be he who thinks my gown amiss," said Little John cheerfully, however, pulling in vain at his too-short sleeves. "Now thy bags, good fellow!" he added eagerly. "Ah!" and with a sigh of satisfaction, he adjusted them about him. "Now am I a beggar indeed!" he murmured. "Tell me now, good fellow, some

words used in begging, so I may be as beggar-like as any in my company."

"Thou must cry aloud when naught aileth thee," the palmer replied.

"I thank thee, and farewell," said Little John; and with that off he went, singing a merry song; for although he wore the beggar garb, he had not yet acquired the beggar spirit.

He had not walked many miles along the high-road before he met a group of beggars, and hastened at once to join them.

"God save you, my brothers all!" he cried cheerily. "God save you and me!"

They all looked at him sourly, even the one who was supposed to be blind.

"We had rather such a churl were not in our company!" said one of them ungraciously.

"Good-morrow, my dear brothers!" Little John went on joyously, ignoring this disagreeable speech. "Great is my good fortune to see you. Which way do you go? Pray tell me, for I want company."

They growled and muttered among themselves, but they neither answered directly nor said anything to stop him from joining them; so he added himself to their number without more ado. They

were near Nottingham now, and the bells of the town were ringing.

“Why, what is here to do?” said Little John gayly. “Why ring all these bells, my brothers? What dog is hanging? Let us go and see.”

“Here is no dog a-hanging,” said one of the beggars snappishly. “Here is one dead, and perchance we shall be given bread and cheese and alms at the house of mourning.” Then he paused and looked at Little John insolently. The giant indeed cut a comic figure in the palmer’s gown that was far too small for him, and with the patched clumsy shoes. “We have brethren in London and Coventry and Dover,” he said; “ay, all through the world; and never have I seen so crooked a churl as thou. Thou shalt go no farther with us. Stand back then, or take this knock on the crown!” He raised his fist threateningly.

“Nay,” quoth Little John calmly, “I’ll not yet be gone. I’ll have a bout with you all if ye will. Have at you, if you be so full of your blows! Fight on, all four of you, friends or foes, and never give up!”

With that he seized the “dumb” beggar who so far had talked the most, and nipped him by the

arm in such a mighty pinch that the “ dumb ” one roared again. Then Little John seized the shade which the “ blind ” beggar wore over his eyes, and gave him a punch between the eyes so that the blood ran down and for a moment he saw nothing but stars. Next he fetched the “ deaf ” one a mighty box on the ear and his head rang as with the noise of many waters. Lastly he turned on the “ cripple,” and chased him so that the beggar nimbly unfastened his wooden leg, and showed that he had a pair of perfectly good ones which he turned to excellent account in outstripping Little John. In fact all four beggars began to run; but Little John continued to chase them, keeping within easy distance until they reached the walls of Nottingham. Then Little John rounded up his victims, and with a sturdy buffet apiece from his great fist, he flung them all against the wall, from which they rebounded and lay panting with fatigue and terror. As they struck the stones there was a ringing sound which made Little John prick up his ears and smile sweetly.

“ Methinks,” quoth he, “ my begging is over for the day! Come, my good comrades, I am the victor, look you! Give me your bags as forfeit, I pray you.”



There was a ringing sound that
made Little John prick
up his ears.

TO
NOTTINGHAM



They gave them to him; sulkily, but they dared not refuse, for he stood over them, his great fists ready. Then in their full sight, while they lay baffled and helpless, he leisurely counted the contents of their bags and transferred the money to his own. There was a merry chink of gold and silver as he did so, and a broad smile of satisfaction overspread Little John's face.

"Here are your bags!" he exclaimed at last, flinging the empty pouches to their owners. "Now, dance again, lame man, sing for joy, dumb man, and hear thou his merry music, deaf man. See, blind man, this kiss of thanks which I waft to thee from my fingers for this treasure ye have given me. My fortune hath been so good that methinks I will not go to Nottingham but hie me home again to the forest."

So he turned and left them without more ado.

He found Robin and his merry men waiting for him under the oak tree. It was nearly supper time when he reached them. They raised a great shout of laughter when they saw Little John in his shabby ill-fitting palmer's garb.

"What news? what news?" said Robin merrily. "How hast thou made out with thy beggar's trade, Little John?"

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“No news but good,” replied Little John cheerfully. “I have sped well with my begging, master.”

With that he thrust his hand into his beggar’s bag, and held aloft a great handful of silver and gold.

“I have here for our treasury,” he said, swaggering a little, and who could blame him? “six hundred pounds and three.”

The outlaws raised a shout of astonishment and admiration, and Robin sprang up and seized Little John by the hand.

“Well done, my master beggar!” he cried. “If we drink water while this treasure lasts, an ill death may we die!”

X

HOW ROBIN WAS BEATEN BY THE BEGGAR

AS Robin came from Bernysdale on a fair evening, he met a beggar striding sturdily along with a great pikestaff in his hand. A patched cloak wrapped him warmly, and around his neck hung his meal-bag, held by a leathern strap with a strong, broad buckle. He had three hats on his head, one inside the other, and he looked, as he strode along, as if he cared nothing for either wind or weather.

Robin accosted him courteously.

“Tarry, my friend,” he said, “tarry and speak with me.”

The Beggar paid no attention to him whatever.

“Nay, then, thou *must* tarry!” said Robin firmly, greatly irritated by the Beggar’s lack of manners; and he put out a detaining hand.

“By my troth,” said the Beggar impudently, “I have no will to tarry. It is far to my lodging-house, and it is growing late. I shall look a fool indeed if they have finished supper ere I come in.”

“Now by my troth,” said Robin in his turn, “thou thinkest much of thy supper, but little of mine. I want my dinner all day long, and know not where to lie. Should I go to the tavern, I shall need money. Give me, prithee, or lend me, some until we two meet again.”

“I have no money either to give or to lend,” answered the Beggar in a crabbed voice. “Thou art as young a man as I am, and seemest as reluctant to part with money. If thou fast until thou gettest alms from me, thou shalt eat none all this year.”

Robin was perfectly furious by this time.

“If thou have but a small farthing about thee,” he said between his teeth, “I’ll have it ere thou go. Lay down thy cloak, therefore, and loose the strings of all thy bags or I’ll rip them with my hand. I vow to thee that if thou dost make a noise, I’ll see whether a broad arrow can pierce a beggar’s skin.”

The Beggar smiled tauntingly and answered:

“Far better let me be!” There was a hint of menace in his manner. “Think not I fear thy little crooked staff! Faith, ’tis about fit for a pudding-stick, no more! I defy thee to do me ill for all thy boisterous threats; but thou’lt get

nothing from me but ill shouldst thou seek it forever!"

For answer, Robin bent his bow, and set in it a broad arrow. He was crimson with rage. Before he could shoot, however, the Beggar fetched him so round a blow with his great staff that bow and arrow alike flew to the winds in splintered fragments. Then Robin drew his sword, but that likewise proved vain, for the Beggar fetched him a blow on his right hand that rendered him helpless.

Robin's heart was sore within him. His hand, now entirely useless, hung at his side. He could neither fight nor flee, and for a moment he found himself speechless.

"Ho! Ho!" laughed the Beggar in mockery, and then in most unsportsmanlike fashion, since it is always contemptible to strike a foe who cannot defend himself, began to cudgel the crippled Robin right lustily. At last, weak and helpless from the hailing blows, the outlaw fell in a swoon.

"Fie!" quoth the Beggar tauntingly. "Stand up, man! 'Tis a shame to go to bed so early! Stay till thou dost get the alms thou didst ask me for! Then take it to the tavern, and

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buy wine and ale, and make merry with thy friends!”

But poor Robin's ears were deaf now to his taunts. He lay as still as any stone, his cheeks white, his eyes closed. The Beggar grew a little frightened at last, thinking that perhaps he was dead; so the vagabond took to his heels and fled.

Scarcely was he out of sight when three of Robin's merry men happened to stroll that way; Will Stutely, David Doncaster, and Gilbert of the White Hand. Great was their amazement and horror to find their master lying on the ground, apparently either dead or near to death. In much alarm and with many lamentations, they raised him, and strove to recover him, wondering who or what had brought him to this state. They saw no foe in sight, and no wounds, only bruises. At length, after repeated dashes of cold water in his face, Robin began to revive. He opened his eyes, and spoke faintly.

“Welcome, dear comrades!” he said falteringly.

“Tell us, dear master, how it stands with you!” cried Will Stutely, tears of relief in his eyes to hear Robin's voice again.

Robin gave a heavy sigh, and spoke sluggishly because of his weakness.

“Never have I been so hard bested in all the years I have lived in Sherwood!” he groaned. “A beggar with a patched cloak it was who hath so mauled me! He goes o’er yon hill with his hat upon his head. If e’er ye loved me, avenge this deed. Bring him back to me that I may see him punished ere I die!” And Robin groaned again; for he felt very weak and ill, and as if he were indeed near death.

“That will we do, master!” quoth Gilbert of the White Hand. “One of us will remain with thee, and care for thee, since thou art so ill at ease. The other two will bring him back for thee to use as it pleaseth thee best. Come, David, we will go, and let honest Will remain with our master.”

So it was settled, and Gilbert and David started off together.

“Now by my troth,” Robin called after them faintly, “if he get room to wield his staff, I fear me he’ll be too much for ye both.”

“Never fear, our good master!” they answered cheerily. “His staff shall stand him in no stead against two of us, as thou shalt see. We shall bring him back to thee bound, that thou mayst

either slay him with a sword, or hang him on a tree, as thou wilt."

"Capture him by strategy then," said Robin, "and lay hands first on his pikestaff."

Then he sank back into Will Stutely's arms, and his eyes closed again from very weakness.

Meanwhile the two outlaws strode briskly along. They knew the country well, and they calculated shrewdly in what direction the Beggar would probably go; with such success that shortly after they had left Will and Robin they came upon him walking along the highway near a little wood.

They stood each by a tree, and as he attempted to pass them, they leaped upon him. David grasped his staff, and Gilbert held a drawn dagger threateningly against his heart.

"False churl, give up thy staff," quoth David, "or I shall forthwith be thy priest!"

The Beggar with a grunt of anger was obliged to yield. They took his staff from him and stuck it upright in the moss near by, at the foot of one of the trees.

The Beggar, like all bullies, was very much afraid when he found himself in their power. He could not use his staff, he did not know why

they had taken him prisoner, nor how many more stout yeomen might be hidden among the trees. He thought death was staring him in the face; and so he began to whine.

“Grant me my life,” he whimpered, “and take away that ugly knife, good master, I pray you! Why have ye seized me thus? I never harmed you in all my life! Ye are great sinners if ye do kill a poor silly old beggar!”

“Thou liest, false loon,” said Gilbert sternly, “thou liest when thou dost say that thou hast never harmed us! Thou hast nearly slain our master, the gentlest man that ever was born!”

“And back again thou shalt be led to him,” added David sternly, “that he may do with thee as he will. Bound thou shalt go, and at his mercy. Whether he will slay thee by sword or hang thee, I know not.”

Then was the Beggar horribly frightened indeed, and his teeth chattered in his head.

“If I were but out of their hands,” he thought savagely, casting wishful eyes at the good staff but a short distance away, “if I had my stout tree again ——” And then he bethought him of a trick that he might play on the young men whereby he might regain his weapon.

“ Brave gentlemen,” he whined, “ be good, and let the poor man be! What shall it profit you to take a beggar’s blood? If your master hath come to harm, it was but in mine own defense. I will make recompense much better for both of you. If you will let me go, I will give you one hundred pounds, and much more good silver that I have here under this patched cloak of mine. ’Tis in the bottom of my bag.”

The young men looked at each other doubtfully.

“ One hundred pounds and more! ’Twould be a goodly sum to add to our treasury,” quoth David.

“ He cannot escape us. If he tried, we could either of us easily outstrip him,” said Gilbert. “ Let us take his offer.”

“ False churl,” said David, addressing the Beggar, “ have done thy whining, and hand out thy money. For the ill turn thou hast done our master, ’tis but a trifling price to pay. If thou wilt give us the sum thou dost speak of, we will let thee go.”

“ So be it, good masters!” quoth the Beggar snuffling. Then with a great show of reluctance, and heaving many a sigh, he spread his patched

cloak on the ground, and laid out his bags upon it. He was careful to place his cloak so that it was between them and the wind. Then he laid a bag of meal on his cloak, and with a sudden dexterous turn of his wrist, he opened the bag, seized a double handful of the meal, and flung it straight into the faces of the two young men.

While they stood blinded and coughing and spluttering, he grabbed his staff, and with a derisive laugh began to belabor them as he had belabored their master. They were perforce obliged to run, stumbling along, and trying savagely to clear their faces of the meal.

“Why this haste?” said the Beggar tauntingly, beating them soundly the while. “Will ye not tarry until I pay ye the money? Ye must see it, that I do not cheat you! If in shaking my bag, some of my meal hath gotten into your eyes, I humbly crave your pardon! Let me wipe them clean with my good pikestaff!” And with that, fearing that they might indeed get their faces cleared before he made good his escape, the Beggar gave them one parting wallop, and ran away right lustily through the thick woods.

It was an abashed pair enough that came

slowly walking back to Robin where he awaited them with Will Stutely.

“How have ye sped?” quoth Robin eagerly, but with a twinkle in his eyes, for their woebe-gone appearance told its own tale.

“Full ill!” they answered dolefully.

“That surely cannot be!” said Robin solemnly. Then he looked them up and down and laughed, albeit somewhat weakly, for his bruises were still very sore. “Have ye been at the mill?” he asked; for they were yet well covered with the telltale flour. “Your clothes look as if ye had been helping yourselves to the miller’s store.”

With drooping heads they made a clean breast of the whole story; for they were dreadfully ashamed of themselves to have been so outwitted by the rascally Beggar. When they had finished, Will Stutely’s broad shoulders were shaking with mirth, and even Robin, faint and ill as he still felt, was smiling uncontrollably.

“Yonder is a terrible beggar indeed!” he said. “Fie for shame!” and he heaved a long sigh. “I fear me we are disgraced forevermore!” he murmured sadly.

David and Gilbert also fetched long sighs, and

they looked so ridiculous with their mealy faces and their sad expressions that Will and Robin began to chuckle again. At last, rather sheepishly, David and Gilbert joined in their laughter, and so after a little, the greenwood rang to the sound of their mirth.

“Out, alas!” cried Robin with a grimace, clutching at his side. “I feel still the remembrance of that vile fellow’s blows, and shall for many moons. Come, David; come, Gilbert, let us back to our comrades!” He laid a kindly hand on each man’s broad shoulder. “I would fain have been avenged,” he added; “but methinks the sight of your stripes make mine far easier to bear!”

XI

HOW ROBIN TESTED THE TANNER

AS Robin was standing on the edge of the forest one day, he saw a brawny fellow approaching him, bearing a long pikestaff on his shoulder.

“What art thou, thou bold fellow?” Robin called to him. “In sooth, thou lookest to me like a thief come to steal the King’s deer.”

The big fellow looked at Robin scornfully.

“And what art thou?” he asked coolly in his turn.

“I am—a keeper in this forest,” Robin answered, smiling to himself at his own words. “The King puts me in trust to look to his deer. Therefore I must stop thee.”

“If thou art keeper in this forest,” the fellow answered impudently, “and hast such great command as thou sayest, yet will it take more than that to make me stop.”

Robin began to grow angry at the man’s assurance.

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“ I have no more and I need no more,” he answered sharply. “ I have a staff of another kind than thine which I know will do the deed!” and he touched his bow significantly.

“ I care not a straw for thy bow and thy sword, nor for all thine arrows!” the other said airily. “ Let me get but a crack on thy pate with this trusty staff of mine, and then we shall see how much thou canst shoot.”

“ Nay, then, I see I must correct thine ill manners and teach thee a lesson,” said Robin, now thoroughly angry.

“ Marry, art thou then such a goodly man?” sneered the stranger. “ I care not a fig for thy large looks and thy boasting words. Mend thou thyself where thou canst!”

Then Robin unbuckled his belt and laid down his bow. He kept only his oak staff.

“ I’ll yield to thy weapon,” said Robin, “ since thou wilt not yield to mine. I have a staff not half so good as thine. Let us measure before we quarrel; for it would be unfair that my staff should be the longer.”

“ I care not for length,” said the stranger carelessly. “ My staff is of good oak. It is eight and a half feet long, quite long enough to knock

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down a calf; and so I have hopes that it will knock down thee!”

“My hope is better,” replied Robin briefly; and with that he gave the other man such a crack that the blood streamed down his face.

Presently, however, the stranger recovered himself, and fetched Robin so hard a knock on the crown that it seemed as if blood trickled from every separate hair on his head.

The sight of his own blood enraged Robin, and he began to roar with fury like a wild boar. His opponent saw his dangerous mood and began to lay on blows thick and fast, before Robin had a chance to recover himself.

About and about and about they went like two wild boars in a chase, striving to reach each other on leg, arm or whatever place was nearest. Their quarrel had begun at about ten o'clock; and for two hours or more they dealt lustily knock for knock. They plied their work so sorely that the woods rang with their sounding blows.

At length, much against his will, Robin cried out:

“Hold thy hand, hold thy hand, and let our quarrel fall! Here we might thresh our bones into a jelly, and without reward! In the forest

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of merry Sherwood hereafter thou shalt be free."

"God a mercy for naught!" retorted the other ungraciously. "For my freedom I may thank my good staff, and not thee."

"What tradesman art thou?" asked Robin curiously, as he seated himself rather waveringly on the ground, and looked up at the other man. "Good fellow, I prithee tell me this, and also in what place thou dost dwell, for I would fain know."

"I am a tanner," the stranger answered; "and I ply my trade in Nottingham. If thou'lt come there, I promise thee I will tan thy hide for naught."

"God a mercy!" quoth Robin somewhat ruefully. "Methinks thou hast already done so. At least I have done about the same for thee. If thou wilt forsake thy tanner's trade, and live here in the greenwood with me, I will give thee both gold and food. I swear it by the holy cross. My name is Robin Hood."

"If thou art indeed Robin Hood," replied the tanner, "and I think well thou art, here's my hand! Henceforth we two will never part company."

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“And what is thy name, good fellow?” asked Robin, grasping the huge hand that the other offered him.

“Arthur a Bland,” replied the tanner.

So the two sat down together under a tree, and began very amicably to bind up the wounds that they had just been giving each other.

“Tell me,” said Arthur eagerly, “where is Little John? I would fain hear of him, for he is my near kinsman on my mother’s side.”

“He hath just returned to the greenwood from a journey on which I sent him to accompany a knight,” Robin answered. “Thou shalt see him straightway.”

With that he set his horn to his lips and blew; and quickly Little John appeared coming down over the brow of a hill.

“O what is the matter?” Little John asked Robin, seeing the latter’s many cuts and bruises. “I fear all is not well.”

“Blame yon tanner for the state I am in,” Robin answered. “He is a bonny blade indeed, and assuredly a master workman; for sorely he hath tanned me!”

Then Little John scowled fiercely at the tanner.

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“He is to be praised if such a feat he can do,” he observed coolly. “If he be so stout as thou sayest, master, I also will have a bout with him, and see whether he can tan my hide too!”

“Hold thy hand, hold thy hand!” quoth Robin laughing. “I am told he is a good yeoman, and indeed thy kinsman. His name is Arthur a Bland.”

Then Little John flung his huge staff away as far as he could send it, and he ran to Arthur a Bland and threw his great arms around his kinsman’s neck.

Then after they had done embracing each other, Robin took them both by the hand, and they all began to dance gayly round about the oak tree which had been the scene of Robin’s tanning. While they danced they sang lustily:

*“For three merry men, and three merry men,
And three merry men we be.”*

XII

HOW ROBIN WENT TO CHURCH IN NOTTINGHAM

IN summer time, when the woods are beautiful, and the leaves are large and long on the trees, it is merry to wander in the forests and hear the birds singing; to see the deer drawing to the dale, and leaving the high hills, to take refuge in the shadow of the leaves under the greenwood tree.

It befel one Whitsuntide, early on a May morning, the sun was shining fair and the merry birds were singing.

“This is a merry morning,” quoth Little John, “and a merrier man than I lives not in Christendom!” And he squared his broad shoulders and threw out his chest.

He looked at Robin for sympathy, but Robin did not respond to his mood. He stood, his arms folded, leaning against a tree. Little John gazed at him anxiously.

“Pluck up heart, my dear master,” he said. “Think how fair a time it is and how fair a May morning!”

“Yea, but one thing grieves me, and does my heart much woe,” quoth Robin sighing. “’Tis Whitsunday, and I may not on this solemn Feast go either to Mass or Matins. It is a fortnight since I have been to church. But to-day I will go to Nottingham.”

Nick Much was bustling about getting breakfast ready. When he heard Robin say this, he paused and looked at his chief anxiously.

“Ever well betide thee, master!” he exclaimed. “Take along with thee twelve good men with their weapons by their sides. None will then dare to harm thee.”

“Nay,” answered Robin stubbornly. “Of all my merry men, by my faith I will have none go with me save Little John; and he shall bear my bow for me until I choose to draw it.”

“I thank thee, master,” answered Little John; “but bear thou thine own bow, and I will bear mine, and we will shoot together as we go.”

So it was agreed; and Robin Hood and Little John started off together through the forest towards Nottingham. Robin, however, must have been in a peevish mood that morning; for as they shot with each other, it came to pass that Robin Hood accused Little John of cheating, and these

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two good comrades fell to quarrelling with each other. Finally, Robin knocked down Little John, and fetched him a cuff over the ears. Little John scrambled to his feet in a fury.

“Wert thou not my master,” quoth Little John, “thou shouldst be hit full sore for that blow. Get ye a man where ye will, you get me no more!” And with that he turned on his heel and strode back towards Sherwood.

As for Robin, he went towards Nottingham all alone, and truth to tell he missed his good comrade sorely; but in his sulky mood, he would not admit that he did, even to himself. When at last he reached St. Mary’s Church, in Nottingham, he knelt down very devoutly, and prayed to God and to Mary mild to bring him home safe again. The church was crowded, since it was the great Feast of Whitsunday, and many saw and recognized Robin in his suit of Lincoln green, kneeling devoutly before the holy rood.

Just beside Robin stood a fat monk with a great ill-shaped head. He was of the type that Robin especially despised. The monk recognized Robin as soon as the outlaw knelt beside him, and his beady eyes twinkled maliciously. Presently he left Robin’s side and went out of

the church, but Robin, absorbed in his prayers, never noticed the monk's departure. As soon as the latter had left the church, he ran at full speed, and ordered that all the gates of the city should be closed. In those days, for the sake of protection, towns and cities were usually enclosed by walls with gates at certain intervals. After this the monk ran and knocked loudly at the Sheriff's door.

"Rise up, you proud Sheriff!" he cried. "Rise up and make ready! I have seen an outlaw, for truly so he is, in this town. Yea, I have spied him as he stood at Mass. Once he robbed me of a hundred pounds. I have never forgotten nor forgiven him. His traitor name is Robin Hood."

"Robin Hood!" cried the Sheriff eagerly. "One moment, holy father, and I will be with thee."

Hastily he summoned his men, and presently the monk and the Sheriff and a score of the Sheriff's men were on their way to the church. When they reached there, they rushed in at the door with their staves all ready; a score of men to capture one.

Robin looked up and saw them; for naturally

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their entrance made a great commotion in the church.

“Alas!” said Robin to himself. “Now miss I Little John.”

Nevertheless he rose from his knees, drew his sword, and charged bravely towards the Sheriff and his men.

Just outside the church door Robin began his brave and unequal fight, and the congregation streamed out of the church, and stood by looking on. Many a man Robin wounded, and twelve he slew, but it was uneven work. Once he attacked the Sheriff, and his sword broke in two upon the Sheriff's head.

“I pray God work woe to the smith who made thee!” quoth Robin ruefully, casting away the useless sword. “Now am I weaponless, alas! against my will, and I fear these traitors. I must run or they will kill me!” And with that he turned, and flinging open the doors, took refuge in the church; for he knew that none would dare to shed blood there. The Sheriff's men speedily followed and captured him, and he was borne away to prison amidst the loud rejoicings of the Sheriff.



Outside the church door Robin began
his brave and unequal fight.



XIII

HOW LITTLE JOHN SAVED ROBIN FROM PRISON

MEANWHILE, when time passed in Sherwood, and Robin did not return, all his men were worried, but especially Little John.

“He has served Our Lady many years,” he muttered to himself; “and I trust to her that no wicked death shall he die. Come, Much,” he called to his comrade, “let us go in search of our master.”

So they strode forth together, and as they went, they saw a monk come riding along, and with him a little page. It was the same monk who had betrayed Robin to the Sheriff, but that, of course, Much and Little John did not know.

“Here comes one from Nottingham,” said Little John aside to Much. “I know him by that wide ill-shaped head of his.” Then they came to the monk, and greeted him in apparently friendly fashion.

“Whence come ye?” asked Little John.

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“Tell us tidings, I pray you, of a false outlaw named Robin Hood who we hear has been taken captive. He robbed me and my fellow of twenty marks. If he be taken we shall be glad to know it.”

“Ay,” said the monk, “he robbed me of an hundred pounds. It was I who first laid hands upon him in Nottingham, so ye may thank me for his capture.”

“I pray God thank you,” said Little John very sweetly, “and we will when we may. We will go with you now, and bring you on your way in gratitude. Robin Hood has many a wild fellow in the forest, and if they knew you were riding here, they would certainly slay you in vengeance for their master’s death.”

The monk turned pale, and glanced about him fearfully.

“I thank you,” he said. “I will go with you, good sirs.”

So they went on together, the monk and his page riding, and Little John and Much walking, the first at the head of the monk’s horse and the other at the page’s. Suddenly Little John turned on the monk, and seizing him by the throat, dragged him down from his horse.

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“Robin Hood was my master,” said Little John almost sobbing; “and it is thou, false monk, who hast brought about his capture. Never shalt thou tell thy tale again!” And with that he smote off the monk’s head with a single blow. Then they let the little page go, and they went through the monk’s baggage, and found a letter to the King.

“This letter will I bear myself to my liege King,” quoth Little John. “Come, Much, we will not waste time on the Sheriff. I will take the monk’s horse, and do thou take the page’s, and we will hie us to the King in London.”

So off went Nick Much and Little John to London. When, after many days, they reached the city, they sought at once the King’s presence. Then Little John fell down on his knees before his sovereign and he said:

“God save you, my liege lord!” and he presented the King with the letters that he had taken from the monk’s body.

The King unfolded the letters and scanned them rapidly.

“So might I thrive,” said His Majesty, as he refolded the letters, “there was never a yeoman in merry England that I longed so sorely to see.

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Where is the monk that should have brought these letters? ”

“ So please Your Majesty,” replied Little John innocently, “ he died on the way.”

The King sat an instant in deep thought.

“ Take to the Sheriff of Nottingham,” he said, rousing himself at length, “ the royal seal of England, and bid him bring Robin Hood to me.”

So Little John, rejoicing, took his leave of the King, and went back to Nottingham. When he reached the town, the gates were closed. With a mighty noise and halloaing, Little John summoned the porter.

“ What is the cause they have the gates bound so fast, fellow? ” quoth Little John importantly.

“ Because Robin Hood is cast in deep prison,” answered the porter. “ Little John and Nick Much, truly you have slain our men on our walls, and attacked us every day.”

“ Well, be that as it may,” said Little John, “ summon me here the Sheriff.”

“ Summon the Sheriff to you!” replied the porter trembling. “ Nay, I should not dare! Rather must ye seek him.” And to this decision he held, despite Little John’s urging to the contrary. Little John was much disappointed, for

he had taken rather a fancy to the idea of the Sheriff's being called before him. At length, however, seeing that the porter was not to be persuaded, he shrugged his shoulders and yielded. He strode to the Sheriff's house, and knocking loudly on the door, demanded to see him.

When the Sheriff appeared:

"Here," said Little John magnificently, drawing forth the King's seal from his bosom and flourishing it in the Sheriff's face, "here is the royal seal. Tremble and attend!"

When the Sheriff saw the King's seal, he trembled indeed, and doffed his hood.

"Where is the monk that bore these letters?" he said to Little John. He spoke much more respectfully than he usually did either to Robin or to his men.

"Sooth to say," replied Little John cheerfully, "he liked the King so much that His Majesty has made him Abbot of Westminster and lord of that Abbey."

"I pray you stay with me as the King's messenger, good sir," said the Sheriff meekly.

Then he made good cheer for Little John, and gave him his best wine, and Little John spent the night in the Sheriff's best room. Now, be-

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fore retiring they had eaten and drunk very heartily, and the Sheriff was heavy with sleep and wine. So that night he was so sound asleep that he did not hear Little John and Much rise and steal softly out to the prison.

When they reached there, they knocked loudly for the porter, and when sleepy and swearing he appeared, Little John had his sword ready and forced him trembling to the wall.

“Now will I be porter,” said Little John very politely, “and take those keys thou bearest;” and leaving the porter shaking with fear in care of Nick Much, he went in search of his master.

“Master, Master Robin!” he called aloud as he went; and much was his heart rejoiced when he heard at last Robin’s beloved voice in reply.

“Is it thou, Little John?” he said.

“Master, master,” cried Little John, his voice breaking with joy, “have I found thee at last?” Then he slashed Robin’s bonds into ribbons with his dagger, and gave him a sword, and the two joined Nick Much and went merrily off to Sherwood.

Next morning, at the crowing of the cock, the Sheriff found Little John and Nick Much gone; and when he hurried to the prison he found that

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his most precious bird had flown. Then the town bell rang clamorously, and when the citizens came running they found the Sheriff fuming and fussing, and heard the news, many of them with secret gladness, that Robin Hood was free.

“I dare never come before our King again,” cried the Sheriff, “since Robin Hood has escaped!”

Meanwhile, during the hue and cry in Nottingham, Robin sat under the oak tree in Sherwood, his good men around him, and Little John at his right hand.

Presently, in the midst of the feasting, Little John looked at Robin with a twinkle in his eyes.

“Say what thou wilt, master,” he observed, “I have done thee a good turn for an evil. I have brought thee back again to the greenwood. Now farewell, and good-day.”

“Nay, by my troth,” said Robin, “that shall never be!” He clapped Little John on the shoulder. “I make thee master of all my merry men and me,” he said. “I can do no more.”

“Nay, by my troth,” said Little John in his turn, “so shall it never be. Let me be thy man, dear master. I ask no more.”

Then the two clasped hands, and were better

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friends than ever; and merry was the feasting on venison and ale in Sherwood.

When the King heard the whole tale, he was very angry.

“Little John has beguiled the Sheriff,” quoth he, “and in faith, he has beguiled me also. Methinks the Sheriff should be hanged on high. As for Little John, he loves Robin Hood better than any one, and Robin soothly is bound to him. We will speak no more of this; but Little John hath beguiled us all.”

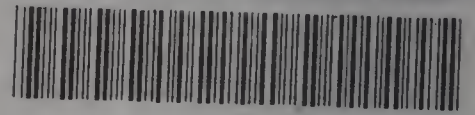
So Little John outwitted the Sheriff of Nottingham and Robin Hood and his men hunted deer and evil-doers in Sherwood Forest.

THE END





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